

TOP 10 TIPS FOR A NATURAL LAWN

The golf course syndrome has created the unrealistic ideal of a 100% weed free lawn. Unfortunately, the quick-fix chemical approach comes with a hefty environmental and human health price tag. Changing the focus from pest eradication to the prevention of pest problems using the following steps will help us and our neighbours understand that the occasional weed and insect is a sign of a normal, healthy, non-toxic lawn.

1. Mow High

Setting your mower's cutting height to 2.5 or preferably 3 inches will discourage invasion by weeds and insects. This encourages growth of longer, healthier roots that help lock in moisture. Also, keeping your mower's blade sharp at all times is crucial to preventing disease from setting into the lawn.

2. Leave Grass Clippings On The Lawn

Leaving your grass clippings on the lawn ensures that this mulch becomes your lawn's fertilizer, thereby reducing the need to add additional fertilizers by 30%. If the mulch is quite wet, compost it instead.

3. Water "Deeply"

When you water your lawn, water deeply, applying approximately 1 inch (2.54 cm). To minimize evaporation, water before 8 a.m. or in the evening. In order to conserve our water resources, consider watering no more frequently than once every one or two weeks, depending on weather. Watering more frequently than once a week encourages weak, shallow roots.

4. Use Ecological Methods Of Pest Control!

Concentrate on prevention methods as your first line of ecological pest control. Overseeding in the fall, mowing high, and leaving grass clippings for mulch will greatly reduce the number of pest problems. Add clover to your mix to encourage nitrogen fixing bacteria in the soil. Remove the odd weed by hand removing as much of the root as possible to prevent re-growth. If possible, try to avoid the addition of other substances to the soil. Intensive application of even organic materials can disturb the delicate balance of beneficial organisms that are developing in healthy soil.

5. Alternatives

You may want to reduce the area of grass that needs maintenance by planting perennial flower beds, expanding your herb and/or vegetable garden, or naturalizing

your lawn with local wildflowers and plants. If you choose to have a traditional lawn, think about adding clover and consider carefully what type of grass you grow. Many varieties of grasses are available to suit a wide range of growing conditions.

6. Rake

Raking to gently remove thatch - the layer of dead grass compacted over winter - can increase water absorption. Raking in late spring or early summer is ideal; any sooner than this, the grass feels spongy (a sign that raking can damage roots).

7. Fertilize

Natural decomposition of organic matter is nature's own fertilizer. Adding clover to soil, using grass clippings, compost, and autumn leaves as mulch follows natural biochemical strategies for creating the essential plant nutrients, nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K), as well as nurturing vital soil organisms. If you wish to add fertilizer, apply organic fertilizers in the spring and fall or just in the fall. Use a slow-release, granular, 100% organic fertilizer such as compost, rock mineral, bone and blood meal that will feed the soil's organisms (chemical fertilizers destroy them), and last the whole year through.

8. Aerate

Aerating your lawn by removing small plugs of earth will decrease soil compaction, increase water retention capacities, and improve air circulation to the roots. June or autumn is the optimum time to do this because heavy seeder weeds germinate and grow in the plugholes. Rent an aerator from your nursery, or hire an organic lawn care company to do it, or buy aerating shoes and dance on your lawn! In time, as your lawn and soil become healthy, nature's aerators – earthworms - will do the job for you.

9. Top-Dress With Compost

If you don't have your own vegetable compost heap (get one!), buy composted cow or sheep manure or mushroom compost. Spread it around at 100 pounds per 1000 square feet. This is best done immediately after aeration, any time between mid-June and the end of August.

10. Overseed

When combined with aeration and top-dressing, overseeding will fill in bare patches that invite weed invasion. First, loosen the soil, spread compost or peat moss; then, sprinkle grass with seeds of hardy species.

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